

Organization of Eastern Caribbean States

The Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) was founded in 1981 by six English-speaking Caribbean island nations once known as the WEST INDIES ASSOCIATED STATES, plus MONTSERRAT. The OECS requested U. S. military aid to stage an invasion of Grenada in 1983 after a military coup there and has explored the possibility of creating a political federation to strengthen the region's economic position.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines lies among the WINDWARD ISLANDS of the Lesser Antilles (see ANTILLES, GREATER AND LESSER) in the Caribbean Sea. A former British-associated state, it gained its independence in 1979.

Land, People, and Resources

The nation includes the island of Saint Vincent and the northern GRENADINE ISLANDS. Heavily forested volcanic islands rise to 1,234 m (4,049 ft) at Soufriere, a volcano that last erupted in 1979. Saint Vincent has a pleasant tropical climate with an average temperature of 27 deg C (80 deg F) and rainfall totaling 2,540 mm (100 in) annually.

The population is mainly of black African descent. Primary education is free but not compulsory. The country has teacher training and vocational colleges.

Agriculture, which provides about two-thirds of the total employment, was slow to recover from the devastation caused by the volcanic eruption in 1979 and by hurricanes and tropical storms in 1979 and during the 1980s. Bananas and arrowroot are the main cash crops, and tourism and food processing are important industries. In recent years imports have created a large trade deficit.

History and Government

The first known inhabitants of Saint Vincent were the ARAWAK Indians, who were later driven out by the CARIB Indians. Christopher Columbus was the first European to land (1498) on Saint Vincent. During the 17th and 18th centuries both Britain and France claimed the island, but in 1763, Saint Vincent was ceded to Britain. In 1885 the Windward Islands were made a separate British colony. Saint Vincent became a British-associated state in 1969 and gained full independence on Oct. 27, 1979.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is governed under a constitution promulgated in 1960. In 1984 and 1989 elections, James F. Mitchell's New Democratic party defeated the Labour party of F. Milton Cato. Cato had been in power between 1969 and 1984, except for 1972-74 when Mitchell headed a coalition government. Mitchell and his party gained their third consecutive electoral victory in February 1994; Mitchell won a further 5-year term in office. The country is a member of the ORGANIZATION OF EASTERN CARIBBEAN STATES.

Bibliography: Macpherson, J., Caribbean Lands, 4th ed. (1980); Parry, J. H., and Sherlock, P. M., A Short History of the West Indies, 4th ed. (1988); Payne, A., and Sutton, P., eds., Dependency under Challenge (1984); Watts, D., The West Indies (1990); Worrell, D., Small Island Economies (1987).